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ABSTRACT

Narratives are the preferred model for conserving and communicating practical craft knowledge. The undercurrent of narratives was examined in three sites where practical craft knowledge was communicated: (1) a kitchen in a fishing community; (2) high school classrooms; and (3) a staffroom where teachers tell novices and researchers stories in order to explain themselves. The narratives demonstrated how important experiences and knowledge are fashioned into narratives for storage and easy retrieval so that they can be used to judge practice and to be shared with fellow practitioners. The experienced teachers' narratives as told to novices illustrate good praxis upon which the novice can fix his or her eyes and which can be used as models for future achievement. Narratives containing craft knowledge often offer both good practice and recipes for survival. The narratives should tell a great deal about the nature of teaching. (Thirty-one references are attached.) (SG)

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NARRATIVES AND CULTURAL TRANSMISSION IN HOME AND SCHOOL SETTINGS

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INTRODUCTION

Narratives are the preferred model for conserving and communicating practical craft knowledge. Practitioners in different occupations all over the world teach by telling stories. These stories are concrete, contextualized and communicate fundamental aspects of praxis. Many belong to a kind of collective memory of a community of practitioners, others are an individual's experience organized by the narrator into a story. Narratives of praxis form a kind of communication "undercurrent" in many practically oriented professions. The narrative undercurrent is frequently rejected by scholarly discourse (Clandinin and Connelly, 1987).

The concepts "narrative", "narration", and to "narrate" have latin roots where similar words mean "expertise", "knowledge" and "skill" (White, 1980). The present use of the concept "narrative" in English and several other Western languages retains some of the latin roots. Regardless of the discipline or scholarly tradition, narrative tends to refer to structure, knowledge and skill in accomplishing a narrative. A narrative works like a "root metaphor" (Sarbin, 1986). It guides the mind through the experience, information or facts that are to be narratized. If, for example, a computer is selected as a root narrative for human cognition, the computer metaphor dictates how the mind may be subsequently described (Gergen and Gergen (1986). The choice of the computer as a root metaphor directs the researcher into research areas such as "information processing", "storage", or "retrieval." Gergen and Gergen (1986) make the observation that "such processes do not lie there to be discovered in nature, but are the necessary outcome of adopting the organizing metaphor" (page 25).

In this paper I will examine the undercurrent of narratives in three sites where practical craft knowledge is communicated: a kitchen in a fishing community, high school classrooms, and stories teachers tell a novice teacher in the staffroom and stories they tell a researcher to explain themselves. All of these sites are contexts for storytelling and in all the cases there exists a scholarly and abstract form of education. The formal education, however, leaves a niche for the concrete, particular, personal and often magical aspects of the collective memory of practitioners. This practical knowledge is valued by the practitioners because often it includes information about how to survive in a particular and concrete situation; **this** community, **this** school, or **this** classroom (Polkinghorne, 1988).

There are, I feel, important similarities between knowledge and surviving at sea and in the classroom. Both sites are unpredictable and surviving is much more a case of "hands on" craft knowledge and common sense than abstract scientific knowledge and theory (Doyle, 1977). While both groups of practitioners mostly rely on craft knowledge in their daily praxis, both groups, especially the fishermen, use science and advanced technology to supplement and extend their craft knowledge. The teacher and the captain on a fishing boat both know only too well that success is not a matter of following a scientifically proven formula or adhering to a tradition, but requires instead a unique blend of common sense, craft knowledge and enriching insights provided by theories and science.

NARRATIVES IN THE WORLD OF PRAXIS

In the world of praxis, the narrative is a solution to a "problem-in-living" (Robinson and Hawpe, 1988) or simply a matter of survival. It is a tool that arranges experience to make it comprehensible, memorable and shareable (Olson, 1990). The narratives practitioners use to frame craft knowledge build on a generic set of categories and relationships. Each story resembles another to a different degree, thus a sense of familiarity and similarity is achieved and a tradition maintained (Robinson and Hawpe, 1988).

Experience does not present itself with a beginning, a middle and an end. Narrative thinking involves the projection of the narrative form onto some experience or event. It is the narrative that selects relevant items, sorting them out and structure into a meaningful sequence. The resulting narratives are models representing both the world around and the practitioner's perspective of that world. Thus, the creation and the telling of a narrative shows the "inseparability of thought and action" (Elbaz, 1990).

The narrative nature of craft knowledge has been studied by several researchers. All of these studies show that the narrative is one of the most widely used methods of storing, using, and communicating craft knowledge. Bertaux and Kohli (1984) studied bakers in France where craft knowledge collected for centuries is passed on to novices in the context of apprenticeship. The traditional birth attendant studied by Jordan (1989) used narratives as "packages of situated knowledge" (page 935). During birth the midwives told stories of similar incidents to aid in diagnosis and make decisions for a course of action. Jordan's research illuminates clearly the interrelationship between thought and action. Successful praxis is not just doing, but also knowing what stories to tell and when. Stories are not excluded in the world of high technology. Orr (1987) describes how photocopy repairmen use narratives to diagnose problems with photocopiers. He observes that diagnostic narratives are the "raw material for war stories of the technicians" (page 7). These narratives, when told and retold, become part of the knowledge base of the repairmen and the collective craft knowledge of the group.

The following narrative sites describe the context for narratized craft knowledge and how they are communicated. Event though the sites are far apart geographically and socially, they have fundamental aspects in common. People are trying to transform knowing into telling. In the world of praxis, be it fishing or teaching, the narrative seems like a natural choice.

NARRATIVE SITES

Kitchens, like my grandmother's kitchen, and other social institutions in small fishing villages in the coastal communities in the Northern Atlantic have been classrooms for both novice and experienced fishermen. Even in this age of "naval academies" and science and advanced maritime technology these informal classrooms retain their functions as places for learning "survival techniques." Today, many fishermen go to the naval academy where they learn things more general and abstract: navigation, biology, oceanography, physics, math, meteorology, astronomy, electronics and subjects related to general education. This school knowledge has its limits because it does not tell the fisherman from where to "go for cod in March without getting killed." The craft

knowledge is particular, incomplete, fluid, and often un-explainable or fused with magic. This is the knowledge communicated in the "kitchens" and other social institutions of these communities. It is the knowledge fishermen need for making a living and staying alive.

The stories I heard as a youngster and remember vividly today dealt with puzzling things. Why did the fish disappear from the Höfda Bank? Stories were told and analyzed of other good fishing banks where the fish had disappeared and returned/not returned?[1] Matching engines to fishing boat type and size? Fishing gear provided an inexhaustible topic. The fishermen experimented constantly mixing gear "genres" to achieve the best results.[2]

The largest category of stories dealt with getting stuck with their fishing gear and almost "going down." The ocean bottom around our village was one big lava bed posing constant dangers for getting stuck and sinking the boat. These stories described how to pull the net and turn around in an effort to get unstuck without ruining expensive fishing gear. It was almost as if the fishermen had a picture in their mind of the bed with every cliff and odd shape firmly imprinted. Once sonar arrived in our village, my grandfather and his friends saw nothing new. The image provided by the electronic gadget only confirmed what they had known all along.

Every fishing community in the North Atlantic maintains a collection of narratives like this. They are necessary for survival in their traditional fishing grounds. In 1972 a volcanic eruption right in the middle of my village forced the evacuation of the community. The fishermen took their boats to a new coastal communities to try their luck in new fishing grounds. They had to learn a whole new set of specifics. It is not easy to do so since there are many new things to learn. Not surprisingly, the fishermen and their families were the first to return two years later when the eruption was over. They had cruised around the strange fishing grounds taking the temperature of the water, looking at the sonar, analyzing the salt percentage, or measuring the waves, but they did not know where to go for the cod and they could not avoid the dangerous places. Some of them were never to return to the fishing grounds of their fathers.

Classrooms all over the world and for thousands of years have been the sites where teachers tell stories. Those of us who have had good storytellers as teachers will remember them for the rest of our lives. Good teacher are more than good storytellers, they know good stories to tell (Egan, 1988). Elementary teachers like Paley (1990) and Marshall (1963) use stories to engage students in learning to read and write. High school teachers use narratives to organize the curriculum and tell stories to explain important ideas in the curriculum (Gudmundsdottir, 1990a; 1990b; 1991). In history, social entities are collapsed into "quasi persons" and the chain of singular causal relations they are involved in are "quasi plots" (Ricoeur, 1981). The long time span in history gives the sense of unchangebleness, but it can be regarded as "quasi event" such as the shift in dominance from a Mediterranean civilization to the Atlantic, or the rise of Enlightenment. These slow shifts are quasi events and their temporal configurations are like events in a story which derive their significance from their place in the narrative.

Narratives have a special place in classrooms especially where the humanities and social sciences are taught. After all, these subjects deal with the material narratives are made of, the world of human action and the human experience of feeling of discord and fragmentation. Narratives are a practical devise to deal with these issues, especially in a teaching situation. To respond in this way seem to be characteristic of teachers from Castile High School in San Mateo, California, to Nidaros Gymnasium, Trondheim,

Norway. Good teachers have always told stories in their classrooms, but it is only recently that researchers are noticing it.

Teachers' staffrooms have been recognized as a site where craft knowledge is communicated (Clandinin and Connelly, 1987; Huberman, 1983). Indeed, those who do research in school do not fail to hear stories shared even though recording them has not been on their research agenda. These stories are not, however, accepted uncritically by the teachers. They have to undergo an intuitive test that includes value laden perceptions about what is right and just (Huberman, 1983). These stories vary: they can be recipe swapping about how to do things, they can be diagnostic, and they can be informative communicating folklore or illusions treasured by the community. As an elementary teacher I have eagerly participated in different forms of staffroom storytelling. As a novice teacher at the Low Port Primary School in the town of Linlithgow in West Lothian, Scotland, I eagerly listened to the stories told by my more experienced colleagues. During that first year in my teaching career, my inexperience and mistakes triggered some of the most intense story swapping I have ever witnessed as a teacher or researcher.

Mrs. Sinclair, the infant mistress, and her friend Mrs. Munroe, soon realized that the new teacher needed some practical advise and instruction. The culture, however, did not legitimate them telling me to my face what was wrong and how I should do things. After all, I had a piece of paper from a very good Scottish college of education that said I was a qualified teacher. Instead, during recess and the lunch hour they began swapping stories, stories that were targeted at me. Since their classrooms were nearby they were able to diagnose my problems. And they had stories about them. I heard stories about how one could organize group work so that children from the two feuding families in town did not have to work together. I heard stories about how Mrs. Sinclair disciplined Arthur Napier. His brother Alec was a troublemaker in my class. I heard stories about setting up a reading corner, using the sand box in math, teaching rounders, doing a dance drama for Christmas, and using the teachers aid, to name but the few of the very good "how to do" advise I go from them. I heard stories about the use of language in the classroom. I was told that the teacher should not use the local dialect (broad working class Scottish) in the classroom. Mrs. Munroe told stories about how a teacher had, in her opinion, prevented or inhibited children learning to read when he said "ta'ies" instead of "potatoes," "bairn" in stead of "child", "uit" instead of "out," "huis" instead of "house," "ske'les" instead of "skittles" and I began to notice that I used the local dialect. Moreover, I even tried to teach the children to pronounce my name properly, they called me "Gudmu'shu'er."

I was a good listener. I listened with concentrated intensity to their stories. They noticed that I was never late for the lunch hour, always sitting nearby where I could hear them clearly. They seemed to be encouraged and they kept it up for the most of the winter and I learned a great deal. Several years later, when I became teaching practice supervisor in a different country, I adapted some of their stories and used with my student teachers. Arthur Napier became "Gunnar," the sand box became the clay corner, but I must admit that today I do not share their views on the use of dialect in the classroom. That story would be totally rejected in Trondheim, Norway, and my credibility as a researcher and teacher would be devastated if I told it as craft knowledge. Not all stories travel well, especially through time since the folklore of practice does change.

As a researcher I have been spending a great deal of time in schools observing teachers and interviewing them. Once again I am at the receiving end of stories. This time I have a tape in hand and to record their words and transcribe verbatim. These stories tell of experience that has been narratized and I can see that many have taken a traditional story form. Let's listen to an American teacher called "Nancy."

> This was in the 70's when our students' reading ability had begun to fall off noticeably. I was teaching college prep seniors The Heart of Darkness. The novel opens with Marlow and the three friends sitting in a boat on the Themes in England. Marlow is going to tell the story.
>
> I threw out a question about the significance of where these people were sitting. There was a great **BLANK**. I probed a little more. "Who is the narrator? What is important about the point of view?" **BLANK**.
>
> I read three or four sentences and I said to the class: "I am going to ask you to put these lines into your own words, paraphrase them." I gave them a couple of minutes to look at the material and I asked them to tell me what it said. I did not have one student who could do that.
>
> I kept going backwards, like something you want to uncover in the yard and you have to keep digging to find what was buried there. First, you start with the paragraph, then you go to the sentence and to the words. I discovered that on one page in the story there must have been as many as 20 words these college prep seniors had no idea about the meaning of.
>
> Now, of course [with my model] I work backwards though the process that works forward.

Nancy has organized an important element of her experience into a traditional narrative. We hear of the place and characters. It is in the 70's and a college prep seniors who should know more about literature than most students in the school. There is a problem or conflict. These advanced students cannot understand Conrad's language, something Nancy felt they should do. The solution to the problem is the pedagogical model of the subject matter, the centerpiece of her pedagogical content knowledge (Gudmundsdottir, in press). There are also morals to her story that emerges clearly when this story is put together with her other stories. Nancy is on a mission to make all her students read and understand good literature (Gudmundsdottir, 1988).

Connelly and Clandinin (1986) also report a similar traditional narrative where a teacher, "Bruce," has organized important elements from his experience into a story. This story also has characters and a place. It is a boy named Ken, an average quiet boy, and the place is Paragon High School where some students speak a dialect "Paragonese." Several episodes are presented that show how Ken has made it in life. The moral point of Bruce's story is that he has made the decision to use the local dialect in his classroom because he feels it helps to keep his students "inside" socially and psychologically.

In my present research in Norway I get important experience packaged into stories. "Snorre," the great disciplinarian, has a story that explains the discipline aspect of his praxis. "Hallgerd," the language teacher sold on writing, has a vivid story about her teaching before and after she learned of "process writing." "Torolf" tells stories of a 17th century poet to lure students into reading his difficult poetry with a little more interest. It is not trivial or periphery experience that gets narratized. Instead, the narratives seem to go directly to the heart of the teachers professional practical knowledge. Important

elements of this knowledge are represented, illustrated and explained in a narrative. It is a process that stars in teacher education (Carter, 1991) and continues thought teachers' professional life (Ben-Peretz, 1990).

REHABILITATING NARRATIVES IN TEACHING AND RESEARCH ON TEACHING

The narratives described above demonstrate how important experience and knowledge are narratized for storage and easy retrieval so that they can be used to judge practice and to be shared with fellow practitioners. Experienced and knowledge judged important are those that practitioners feel facilitates survival in difficult and complex situations and also help teachers achieve success in practice. All novices hear these narratives and some stories may even later guide their professional practice. These oral narratives along with written accounts by exceptional practitioners serve as powerful models for the novice. Such models describe and often vividly illustrate examples of good praxis that the novice can fix his or her eyes on and hope to achieve sometimes in the future. The stories I heard as a novice teacher at Low Port Primary School in Linlithgow provided me with recipes to survive that year and some of the stories also had more lasting effect on my subsequent teaching career. Mrs. Munroe and Mrs. Sinclair and few of their stories became lasting and good role models in the years to come. I am not the only one who needed a role model in the insecure times of the novitiate period. Bullough (1988), in his study of a novice teacher, shows how teacher education can help students survive the first year of teaching by giving them powerful models that contain ideas of good praxis, survival techniques and at the same time growth points for the future.

Narratives containing craft knowledge are often both examples of good practice and recipes for survival. As such they should tell us a great deal about the nature of teaching. These stories are increasingly coming to the attention of researchers. Stories told by teachers in praxis and narratives of praxis are finding their way into the research literature (Ben-Peretz, 1990; Carter, 1991). Scholars like Jackson (1986) and Egan (1988) are calling for the rehabilitation of this oldest of all teaching methods. Researchers like Mishler, (1986 and 1990) and Connelly and Clandinin (1990) are drawing attention to the fact the inquiry process itself is narrative in nature. Good research always tell a story (Davies, 1974), but in the world of educational research the story has to emerge from consolidating on one hand the theories that guide inquiry and themselves are the results of a narrative mode of thinking (Bruner, 1986) guide inquiry and, on the other hand, the storied world of our informants.

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ENDNOTES

1. The answer came two years later when there was an sub-sea volcanic eruption and an island was formed, still standing today and called Surtsey. The fishermen figured out afterwards that the sea bottom must have "heated up" making it impossible for the fish to feed and hatch.

2. They had to experiment because during this time they began fishing untraditional creatures, like lobster and shrimp, which my grandfather called "insects" and "unfit for humans."